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- 1 Ann Taylor Allen, *The Transatlantic Kindergarten: Education and Women's Movements in Germany and the United States*
- 2 New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. 292. ISBN: 9780190274436
- 3 Natasha Anderson
- 4 If it takes a village to raise a child, then it required a transnational village to create the kindergarten. In *The Transatlantic Kindergarten*, Ann Taylor Allen traces the development and dissemination of the kindergarten as an institution shaped by transnationality. In a book both enlightening and entertaining, Allen tracks the cross-border interaction of women's movements in the United States and Germany from the 19th century to today in order to illustrate how modern concepts of early childhood education grew from the collaboration of "a transatlantic community of educators" (10).
- 5 The Introduction delineates the far-reaching consequences of the kindergarten. While the founders focused primarily on the domestic concerns of raising children, their agenda soon touched national politics and participated in transnational networks. Allen also compellingly outlines how the kindergarten movement set the groundwork for feminist activism during the turn of the 19th to the 20th century because the employment of women as kindergartners helped redefine the female identity, the role of men as educators, and the needs of children. The first chapter opens with a synopsis of how new approaches to childhood education in 18th-century Europe provided fertile soil for the innovative ideas of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi and Friedrich Fröbel to flourish. Allen adeptly balances autobiographical information with pedagogical theory as she surveys how Fröbel, who first coined the term *kindergarten*, was central in advocating the value of

domestic maternal care as the cornerstone of child development and society. The growth and change of educational methods during the 19th century when the kindergarten was transferred from Germany to America as “part of an international progressive culture” (36) comes to the foreground in the second chapter. Allen’s vibrant anecdotes and portraits of women activists on both sides of the Atlantic bring the unique development of the kindergarten to life.

- 6 Chapter three links the growth of the kindergarten to the birth of social welfare concerns in a transnational forum due to increasing urbanization in both the U.S. and Germany. In this context, women’s unpaid work in kindergartens was portrayed as a noble crusade against social problems that neatly dovetailed with the ideal of female charity and virtue. As a counterweight to these international trends, Allen also explores national differences affecting kindergartens by comparing the strong state and comparatively sparse involvement of middle-class women in Germany with the weak social support and much more engaged women activists in America. Allen thus places the kindergarten at the center of a far-reaching network of overlapping social interests, from immigration to temperance. The fourth chapter shows the impact of modern sciences in the late 19th century upon kindergartens, leading to an extensive debate on proper instructional methods. Soon, the traditional emphasis on morality and philosophical concepts was competing against the newer pedagogical approach favoring more physical free play. A major strength of Allen’s book is her exemplification of the kindergarten as a node uniting diverse, intersecting networks. She meticulously traces the lasting impact of this innovative pedagogy on major players and forces of the 19th and 20th centuries: modern artists including Frank Lloyd Wright and Paul Klee, educational reformers such as John Dewey, social organizations like the Hull House, and even the world-famous “Happy Birthday” song.
- 7 Allen analyzes the national differences between Germany and the United States in chapters five and six. With the turn of the century came an increased focus on children and an awakened desire to integrate kindergartens into municipal social services in Germany and public-school system in America. This proved to be a mixed blessing; legitimizing the kindergarten, while causing a loss of autonomy for the female educators. As a result, the role of kindergarteners shifted, in the words of one of the founders of the U.S. kindergarten movement, “from a sacred vocation to a profession” (159).
- 8 In contrast to the in-depth analyses of the previous sections, chapter seven offers a cursory outline of how transnational ties began to fray over time. Allen covers the transition from the vibrant intellectual exchange between Germany and America until the 1890s to the gradual growth of tension due to rising nationalism in the early 20th century. The increasing rejection of foreign concepts on both sides of the Atlantic peaked during the First World War, when kindergartens were urged to assume a more nativist tone. A final overview of the kindergarten development from the 1920s to the present is provided in the concluding chapter. This section recaps the hard-fought achievements and ongoing struggles of women activists. It portrays how modern kindergartens evolved to offer custodial care in Germany and became incorporated into the U.S. public-school system, thereby diverging significantly from Fröbel’s original model. Allen’s closing statement that kindergartens would not exist today without the fertile transnational exchanges of strategies and teachers encourages future studies of transborder alliances fueling women’s movements. Here, an index of the main actors within the transnational kindergarten networks would be a useful resource for the reader. Through this

chronological organization, Allen reveals how the evolution of the kindergarten is a story of change and continuity built upon partnerships that crossed gender, class, religious, and national boundaries. Her book illustrates how a number of factors in the U.S. and Germany – from churches and education systems to gender ideologies and the concept of the welfare state – resulted in divergent formats of the kindergarten. Although Allen employs a comparative approach, she expertly shifts between the two countries to avoid favoring one over the other. This creates a well-balanced presentation of both national differences and transatlantic connections.

- 9 Allen's book effortlessly switches between local events and global movements to intertwine the influence of individual innovation and transnational cooperation. The author includes the portraits of individuals yet always shows how these educators and activists were tied up in larger networks in order to highlight how the kindergarten movement arose from cooperation and mutual inspiration. In summary, this book is a prime example of a meticulously researched and elegantly written book that will leave readers hungry for more.